

# Pol Plançon

the  
complete  
Victor  
recordings  
(1903~08)









## CD I (71:02)

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| 1  | LA SONNAMBULA: <b>Il mulino, il fonte, il bosco... Vi ravviso</b> (Bellini) <i>It.</i><br>23 xii 1903; C 870-I (Victor 85018) | 3:22 |
| 2  | <b>Cantique de Noël 'Minuit, Chrétiens'</b> (Adam) <i>Fr.</i><br>23 xii 1903; B 871-I (Victor 81023)                          | 2:38 |
| 3  | <b>Les rameaux</b> (Faure) <i>Fr.</i><br>23 xii 1903; C 872-I (Victor 85020)  | 3:46 |
| 4  | LE CAÏD: <b>Enfant chéri des dames, des grisettes</b> (Thomas) <i>Fr.</i><br>23 xii 1903; C 873-I (Victor 85019)              | 4:03 |
| 5  | LA DAMNATION DE FAUST: <b>Devant la maison</b> (Berlioz) <i>Fr.</i><br>29 i 1904; B 874-2 (Victor 81034)                      | 1:43 |
| 6  | ROMÉO ET JULIETTE: <b>Allons! Jeunes gens</b> (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i><br>29 i 1904; B 990-I (Victor 81035)                        | 2:09 |
| 7  | STABAT MATER: <b>Pro peccatis</b> (Rossini) <i>Lat.</i><br>29 i 1904; B 991-I (Victor 81033)                                  | 2:43 |
| 8  | FAUST: <b>Vous qui faites l'endormie</b> (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i><br>29 i 1904; B 992-I (Victor 81040)                             | 2:58 |
| 9  | <b>Le lac</b> (Niedermeyer) <i>Fr.</i><br>27 ii 1904; C 989-3 (Victor 85023)  | 3:39 |
| 10 | <b>Les deux grenadiers</b> [Die beiden Grenadiere] (Schumann)<br>27 ii 1904; C 993-2 (Victor 85024)                           | 3:13 |
| 11 | LE CHALET: <b>Vallons de l'Helvétie</b> (Adam)<br>27 ii 1904; B 1050-I (Victor 81037)   | 3:05 |

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| 12 | <b>FAUST: Le veau d'or</b> (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i><br>27 ii 1904; B 1051-I (Victor 81038)                             | 1:55 |
| 13 | <b>Embarquez-vous</b> (Godard) <i>Fr.</i><br>27 ii 1904; B 1052-I (Victor 81039)                                  | 1:36 |
| 14 | <b>Les rameaux</b> (Faure) <i>Fr.</i><br>24 i 1905; C 872-2 (Victor 85020)  | 3:43 |
| 15 | <b>Les deux grenadiers</b> [Die beiden Grenadiere] (Schumann) <i>Fr.</i><br>24 i 1905; C 993-3 (Victor 85024)     | 3:12 |
| 16 | <b>FAUST: Je ferai de mon mieux...Le veau d'or</b> (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i><br>24 i 1905; B 1051-2 (Victor 81038)      | 2:12 |
| 17 | <b>PHILÉMON ET BAUCIS: Au bruit des lourds marteaux</b> (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i><br>24 i 1905; B 2200-I (Victor 81056) | 3:01 |
| 18 | <b>IL FLAUTO MAGICO [ZAUBERFLÖTE]: Possenti numi</b> (Mozart) <i>It.</i><br>24 i 1905; C 2201-I (Victor 85042)    | 3:37 |
| 19 | <b>Le vallon</b> (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i><br>20 ii 1905; C 2319-I (Victor 85042)                                       | 3:57 |
| 20 | <b>Si tu veux, Mignonne</b> (Massenet) <i>Fr.</i><br>20 ii 1905; B 2320-I (Victor 81076)                          | 2:46 |
| 21 | <b>LES SAISONS [JAHRESZEITEN]: Chant du laboureur</b> (Haydn) <i>Fr.</i><br>20 ii 1905; C 2321-I (Victor 85082)   | 3:18 |
| 22 | <b>Jésus de Nazareth</b> (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i><br>20 ii 1905; C 2322-I (Victor 85065)                               | 3:33 |

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| 23 | Le lazzarone (Ferrari) <i>Fr.</i>  | 1:40 |
| 24 | Le filibustier (Georges) <i>Fr.</i><br>20 ii 1905; C 2323-I (Victor 85066) | 1:24 |

## CD 2 (71:27)

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| 1 | Le soupir (Bemberg) <i>Fr.</i><br>25 ii 1905; B 2335-I (Victor 81073)                                    | 2:55 |
| 2 | Le cor (Flégier) <i>Fr.</i><br>25 ii 1905; C 2336-I (Victor 85076)                                       | 3:51 |
| 3 | IL FLAUTO MAGICO [ZAUBERFLÖTE]: Qui sdegno (Mozart) <i>It.</i><br>25 ii 1905; C 2337-I (Victor 85077)    | 2:46 |
| 4 | LE PARDON DE PLOËRMEL (DINORAH): En chasse (Meyerbeer) <i>Fr.</i><br>25 ii 1905; B 2338-I (Victor 81065) | 2:54 |
| 5 | Credo (Faure) <i>Fr.</i><br>25 ii 1905; B 2339-I (Victor 81066)  | 3:07 |
| 6 | FAUST: Vous qui faites l'endormie (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i><br>23 i 1906; C 3023-I (Victor 85100)              | 3:05 |
| 7 | LA DAMNATION DE FAUST: Devant la maison (Berlioz) <i>Fr.</i><br>23 i 1906; B 3024-I (Victor 81034)       | 1:51 |
| 8 | Cantique de Noël 'Minuit, Chrétiens' (Adam) <i>Fr.</i><br>23 i 1906; C 3029-I (Victor 85099)             | 2:47 |
| 9 | FAUST: Le veau d'or (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i><br>8 iii 1906; B 3168-I (Victor 81038)                           | 1:56 |



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| 10 | LE CAÏD: <b>Enfant chéri des dames, des grisettes</b> (Thomas) <i>Fr.</i><br>14 iii 1906; C 3030-2 (Victor 88034)   | 4:18 |
| 11 | Les <b>rameaux</b> (Faure) <i>Fr.</i><br>14 iii 1906; C 3167-2 (Victor 85020)   | 3:53 |
| 12 | Les <b>deux grenadiers</b> [Die beiden Grenadiere] (Schumann) <i>Fr.</i><br>14 iii 1906; C 3169-2 (Victor 85024)  | 3:22 |
| 13 | FAUST: <b>Alerte! Alerte! Ou vous êtes perdus!</b> (Gounod) <i>Fr.</i><br>with Emma Eames, <i>soprano</i> and Charles Damorès, <i>tenor</i><br>25 iii 1907; C 4332-I (Victor 95300) | 2:48 |
| 14 | LE CAÏD: <b>Enfant chéri des dames, des grisettes</b> (Thomas) <i>Fr.</i><br>27 iii 1907; C 3030-3 (Victor 85119)   | 4:08 |
| 15 | DON CARLOS: <b>Où suis-je?...Je dormirai dans mon manteau royal</b> (Verdi) <i>Fr.</i><br>27 iii 1907; C 4343-I (Victor 85116)  | 3:48 |
| 16 | LA DAMNATION DE FAUST: <b>Voici des roses</b> (Berlioz) <i>Fr.</i><br>27 iii 1907; C 4344-I (Victor 85117)  | 2:54 |
| 17 | LA DAMNATION DE FAUST: <b>Une puce gentille</b> (Berlioz) <i>Fr.</i><br>27 iii 1907; B 4345-I (Victor 81087)  | 1:32 |
| 18 | MARTHA: <b>Chi mi dira</b> (Flotow) <i>It.</i><br>27 iii 1907; B 4346-I (Victor 81086)  | 2:38 |
| 19 | ÉTOILE DU NORD: <b>O jours heureux</b> (Meyerbeer) <i>Fr.</i><br>14 iv 1908; C 6111-I (Victor 85124)  | 3:37 |
| 20 | ROBERT LE DIABLE: <b>Nonnes qui reposez</b> (Meyerbeer) <i>Fr.</i><br>14 iv 1908; C 6110-I (Victor 85125)   | 3:49 |

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| <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 30px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 0 auto;">21</div> | <p>MIGNON: <b>Del suo cor calmai le pene</b> (Thomas) <i>It.</i><br/>14 iv 1908; C 6112-1 (Victor 85126)</p> | 3:52 |
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 30px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin: 0 auto;">22</div> | <p>STABAT MATER: <b>Pro peccatis</b> (Rossini) <i>Lat.</i><br/>14 iv 1908; C 6113-1 (IRCC 81)</p>            | 3:59 |

CD 1: all tracks with piano

CD 2: tracks 1 - 5 with piano; tracks 6 - 22 with orchestra

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The historical perspective of this extensive collection of recordings made for the Victor Company by Pol Plançon is appropriately given by Roland Gellatt in *The Fabulous Phonograph*: 'At the turn of the century the opera singer was at the peak of his glory.

Adelina Patti, Nellie Melba, Lilli Lehmann, Francesco Tamagno, Victor Maurel, Mattia Battistini, Pol Plançon - these were more than great vocalists. They were objects of adoration, creatures who inhabited an exhilarating and resplendent society. That by the end of 1905 they had been enticed into the recording studio to perform for the lowly "talker" was a fact of immeasurable significance.

They mellowed the gramophone with the patina of high art.' None of them did so more eloquently and elegantly than Pol Plançon (1851-1914). As a leading bass at the Paris Opéra from 1893-1903, London's Covent Garden from 1891-1904, New York's Metropolitan from 1893-1908, and in concert he reigned, in the words

of Lillian Nordica, as 'the prince of vocalists'.

It is significant that Nordica speaks of Plançon not as the 'prince of basses' but as 'prince of vocalists'. Just about every experienced and knowledgeable commentator who has written of him, either from hearing



Pol Plançon

him in person or on record, has anticipated or echoed Desmond Shawe-Taylor's verdict: 'the most polished singer of whose work there are satisfactory gramophone records'. The clue is in the word 'polished'. Plançon did not have a great voice. He knew it, and in his singing on these records there is never any self-conscious display, exhibition or exploitation of a prodigious organ. It was a good voice, a real bass ranging from a top

F down to an exceptional low D (e.g. his recording of Flégier's *Le cor*).

It was not, then, the voice, lovely, round, resonant and sonorous as it was, but rather what he did with it: how he controlled it, how he managed not only to make it yield extraordinary, even unexampled, feats of vocal



virtuosity - fast and accurate roulades, trills, turns, staccati, etc - but also to sustain a long line in soft extended passages without ever allowing an always distinct and eloquent enunciation of text - in Italian as well as French - to interrupt the melodic flow.

A younger compatriot and contemporary of Plançon's, Reynaldo Hahn, wrote in his book *On Singers and Singing* about the singer's art: 'I came to consider singing as not really a tangible thing, but malleable, in which sounds and words have equal importance, completing each other through some transcendent process of coordination, aesthetic as well as mechanical, lending each other perpetual aid and collaborating in a joint action.' In this lecture, given in 1913 at the University of Annales, Hahn could have been speaking of Plançon. One hears the wedding of setting, text and melody in all of these recordings, even the first, an aria from the first act of *La Sonnambula* (sung in immaculate Italian) in which a count

returns to the village of his birth and youth.

Then there is the vocal virtuosity, notably in the most famous of his performances, the song of the drum-major from Thomas's *Le Caïd* with its unique display of rapid runs, turns, trills and staccati, never duplicated nor

even approached by any other bass. Plançon made three recordings of it, all included here, the best of them the last (1907), assisted by an orchestra (such as it may have been) and improved recording technology.

Much the same may be said of his recordings of the Méphistophélès serenades from both Gounod's *Faust* (Plançon's most famous rôle) and Berlioz's *La Damnation de*

*Faust*. For lightness of vocal touch, subtlety of nuance and elegance of textual enunciation they have remained in a class of their own, along with his singing (in Italian) of the porter's song from *Martha*.

Plançon was not at home in everything. The two versions of Sarastro's arias (in



Plançon as Escamillo

Italian) are arguably far too slow, necessitating breaths in odd places. Similarly the three recordings of Schumann's *Die beiden Grenadiere* are not helped by being sung in French, nor by the omission of Schumann's short piano postlude indicating that the grenadier, in intoning the *Marsellaise*, did so with his last breath. But these are small matters measured against the evidence assembled here to support what the English critic Herman Klein wrote of Plançon's first season at Covent Garden in 1891: 'A splendid artist with a superb voice and a style that was at once elegant and impeccable, who adorned every

part that he played.'

For all the years that Plançon lived and triumphed in the English-speaking world, he remained implacably French. His American colleague, David Bispham, a famous Beckmesser in performances of *Die Meistersinger* in which Plançon sang Pogner (in German), recalled in *A Quaker Singer's Recollections* (1920): 'This great basso, though he had sung in London for many years and continued to be a favourite both in England and America, never accomplished anything in the English language beyond the few words that sufficed to procure the necessities of life.'

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## Pol Plançon's recordings

Pol Plançon's complete recordings were made within the span of six years. The records he made for the Gramophone & Typewriter Company in March 1902 are believed to be his first, although four others made for Zonophone were also issued that same year. Finally, Plançon recorded for the Victor Talking Machine Company between 1903 and 1908. The Victor recordings, all of which are included in this 2-CD set, offer a great breadth of repertoire and have a sonic fidelity which is superior to the earlier recordings.

Plançon recorded a number of works several times, and the first versions of Faure's *Les rameaux*, Schumann's *Les deux grenadiers* and Gounod's *Le veau d'or* from *Faust* are among the most elusive of Plançon's records. These titles in particular were made with Plançon extremely close to the recording horn, giving them a tremendous sonic presence. It was discovered after their release, however, that these three records tended to wear out quickly. As a result, these records had a short life in the catalogues; they were withdrawn in 1905 and substituted with new recordings of the same titles, using the same catalogue numbers.

One of the most serious difficulties in the remastering of historic recordings is determining the speed at which they were originally recorded (i.e. their proper pitch). This is essential for vocal recordings, as the slightest deviation in speed drastically alters the timbre of the voice. Great attention, therefore, has been given to reproducing the musical selections at the correct pitch. It should be noted here that all the works are in the standard keys except for *Allons! Jeunes gens* from Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* and the second version of *Pro peccatis* from Rossini's *Stabat Mater* - Plançon recorded these two selections one semitone below score pitch.

Ward Marston



